

Value for Money Statement

Academy trust name: United Learning Trust

Academy trust company number: 4439859

Year ended 31 August 2014

I accept that as Accounting Officer of **United Learning Trust** I am responsible and accountable for ensuring that the Multi-Academy Trust ("MAT") delivers strong value in the use of public resources. I am aware of the guide to academy value for money statements published by the Education Funding Agency and understand that value for money refers to the educational and wider societal outcomes achieved in return for the taxpayer resources received.

I set out below how I have ensured that the MAT's use of its resources has provided strong value for money during the academic year.

- **Economy**

United Learning Trust ("ULT"), as a large MAT, is able to buy commodities at advantageous rates using its consolidated buying power. In this year that has been leveraged for a number of cost headings. For example, the technology lease that had been negotiated in 2012/13 has been further renegotiated in 2013/14 suppressing costs even more to enable further academies to use mobile technology devices in the classrooms at rates below those possible for single schools (benchmarking estimates 16% savings). The MAT has taken advantage in year of aggregated PC purchasing, allowing our academies to opt-in to group discounts, and we have aggregated the purchasing of more of our software including over 10% savings on Microsoft licences, and a third off apps such as "Show My Homework" that is used across numerous of our academies.

Academy cash balances pooling arrangements have been reviewed with our bankers to enable a higher rate of interest to be received by the charity. A panel of six banks are used to ensure an effective of spread risk and to benchmark rates before deposits are placed.

- **Efficiency**

The quality of education in an organisation depends more than anything on the people who are teaching children and running schools. We aim to recruit outstanding teachers and leaders, and to develop them highly effectively,

attracting increasing numbers of top graduates and being seen as an excellent employer.

As the labour market becomes tighter, we are investing in initiatives that will continue to attract and retain excellent colleagues. We have established United Teaching as a SCITT, and have been successful in growing the number of initial teacher training places available. Over 100 new trainees were recruited for 2014/15 (an increase from over 40 in 2013/14), and we have been awarded 183 places for 2015/16. We are investing in a recruitment package for our schools that face the biggest challenges in recruiting, informed by evidence of what works, to increase schools' chances of recruiting excellent candidates first time. We will measure the impact of this work over 2014/15. We look to develop our own talented staff as leaders, to ensure a strong pipeline of senior staff for the future. Our internal talent management programme has enabled us to identify talent pools for heads, senior and middle leaders. An 'aspiring heads' development programme is in place, and over the past year we have been able to make six permanent headship appointments from within the Group, all appointed following open competition. This focus on development enables us to retain talent within the Group, maximising the benefit of being a large academy sponsor and our unique position running both state and independent schools.

We continue to prioritise putting in place pay and conditions which improve upon state school norms, in order to remain a highly attractive employer. Our pay awards over two years have been 'bottom loaded', in order to increase the pay of our lower paid staff more rapidly. We aim to make further moves to raise the pay of our lowest paid staff in future years. Meanwhile, we have made changes to our teacher pay scales so that they earn at least 5% more than they would in the maintained sector at the start of their careers and continue to earn more highly over the course of their career. Restructuring in a number of our academies over the past year has ensured we can maintain this commitment while ensuring our academies balance their budgets.

Over the past year we have invested in establishing strong, high impact partnerships, both between schools within the Group and with others external to the Group who have skills and experience from which our schools will benefit. We have established a Teaching Schools Alliance involving all the secondary schools in the Group, and are in the process of establishing a primary Teaching Schools Alliance. Allied with the TSAs, we have established 10 subject networks, bringing together teachers from schools across the Group to develop and share practice in priority subjects. United Learning academies benefit from a programme of

Excellence Visits, with 20 planned for 2014/15, enabling staff to see excellent practice in action in United Learning schools, supporting the sharing of best practice. Our partnerships with external providers – for example, the Dean’s Trust and St Ambrose Barlow – are enabling us to deliver CPD focused on driving up the quality of teaching in our academies, while in other cases – for example, the support commissioned from the Rodillian Trust for John Smeaton – we are using external providers to ensure appropriate targeted school improvement support. More widely, partnerships with our six sport ambassadors (leading sports people, each representing a different United Learning value) have enabled 5,500 of our students to benefit from high quality experiences over the year.

- **Effectiveness**

Over the course of the year, we have developed a ‘Framework for Excellence’, codifying for the first time the five key principles which underpin our approach to education across all our schools. These are:

- ◆ The best from everyone
- ◆ Powerful knowledge
- ◆ Education with character
- ◆ Leadership in every role
- ◆ Continuous improvement

We have also developed a school improvement strategy, which identifies the trajectory we expect our academies to follow in order that all are excellent schools within five years (at most) of joining the Group. Our immediate priorities are: maths and English; closing the gap between Pupil Premium pupils and their peers; and stretching the most able. We will continue to keep this strategy under review, ensuring it aligns with the principles set out in our Framework for Excellence.

In our primary academies, performance at KS2 rose across all attainment and progress indicators. Against the key indicator of the proportion of children achieving level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics, our academies improved their performance by 10 percentage points, again, significantly exceeding national improvement.

Particularly strong progress was made at Cravenwood, Beacon View, Victory, Hanwell Fields and Abbey Hey primary schools, all of which achieved improvements of over 20 percentage points on this measure. Southway Primary continued its trend of improving performance, and good improvement was also achieved at Wilberforce and Silverdale primaries.

Particularly high absolute performance was achieved at Corngreaves, Timbertree and William Hulme’s Grammar School, where virtually all pupils achieved

nationally expected standards, and significantly more than national average achieved the higher 'level 5' standard.

Across our secondary academies, performance continued to improve in a year where, nationally, achievement at 5+ GCSEs including English and maths fell sharply.

At GCSE our overall group performance in this measure increased by 1.5 percentage points with seven secondary academies (Glenmoor, Paddington, Seahaven, Sheffield Park, Stockport, Swindon, The Regis) achieving their highest ever grades. Nationally, the performance of state funded schools (when measured on the basis of best entry and taking account of the changes to vocational qualifications) fell by 2.9 percentage points.

Other key achievements include:

- ◆ Narrowing the gap between students on Pupil Premium and those not to 17 percentage points against a 2013 national average of 27 points;
- ◆ Sheffield Park Academy continuing to demonstrate sustained improvement with a headline figure of 65%;
- ◆ WHGS being the second highest achieving state school in Manchester;
- ◆ Stockport Academy improving its headline figure by 17 percentage points; and
- ◆ Paddington Academy achieving 84% - one of the highest results in the country for a school in a similar context.

Post-16, there were notable successes across our academies including:

- ◆ Walthamstow Academy increasing its A*-C grades from 57.6% - 66% and its A*/A from 11.8% to 17.5%;
- ◆ The Regis School increasing its A*-C from 58.2% to 65.2%;
- ◆ Paddington Academy increasing its A*-C grades from 64.2% to 69.8% with increases at A*/A and A*-B too.

We have sought to take advantage of our unique combination of state and independent schools within the group, to develop pupil experiences which challenge and develop all our young people. During the year, some 8,500 pupils from 44 schools took part in some form of group-wide pupil experience. These included:

- ◆ Partnership events with organisations which offer our schools bespoke opportunities, including The Day, Wings of Hope, MyBnk, Free the Children, the OIBC and 7 billion ideas.

- ◆ Cluster and group wide competitions and festivals, including sport, music and poetry.
- ◆ Shared experience between United Learning schools, including meeting our United Learning Sport Ambassadors, sport competitions, the United Learning Primary Poetry and Choral Festival and We Day UK 2014.

We also launched the United Learning Partnership Fund in July 2014, through a £5m donation from philanthropist Alan Howard. The Fund is a unique collaboration between United Learning's independent schools and academies and other independent schools including St Paul's School for Boys, Marlborough, RGS Guildford and Manchester Grammar School.

The donation is the largest ever in the UK for collaborative work between the two arms of the education sector and, over the next five years, will be used to deliver professional development for teachers across the sector and exceptional shared experiences for pupils. During its first year, the Fund will:

- ◆ Launch teacher development programmes in two key subjects;
- ◆ Begin a programme of vivid shared cultural and sporting experiences for students;
- ◆ Support clusters of schools to improve access to top universities;
- ◆ Deliver residential events for the most able students to support their university preparation.

- **Benchmarking**

As one of the largest groups of academies the charity is able to benchmark costs incurred by its academies across the group. Analysis is undertaken twice a year, at budget setting time and the year end. The analysis is used by the central office to discuss potential areas of expenditure where specific academy' costs are outside the group's normal experience. In the year this has been used to identify potential savings which were then reviewed by the academies in question in conjunction with the group's finance and human resources teams.

- **Generating other Income**

During the year ULT academies have been reviewing ways of increasing income generated from their resources. Our academies during 2013/14 generated £2.6 million from the sale of uniforms, and letting of their premises, and resources to local groups and national organisations. As a matter of principle we do not adopt a simple profit-maximising approach to such activities, and in all cases consider where we judge that to do so would be out of line with our aims as a charity. In many cases, lettings recover only the direct costs incurred, in order to further our charitable objects through making available our resources to the local community.

- **Waste and Extravagance**

The organisation is very focused on targeting resources at the education of the pupils at our academies.

As examples, everyone involved with the charity is expected to undertake business travel in the most economic manner using standard class rail tickets as the default method. The charity has negotiated very advantageous rates for car hire and hotel bookings with major suppliers and during the year also undertook a pilot with an online travel booking provider, which is currently under review.

- **Prudent and Economic Administration**

Where we believe that there is a benefit to the charity we centralise operations to reduce the cost of administration due to our scale. The central office team's remit is to support our schools by removing administration where this improves economy and effectiveness so that the schools are better able to concentrate on the education of the pupils attending our academies. Examples of this include:


- ◆ Preparation of the statutory accounts and working with the auditors
- ◆ HR policies and support
- ◆ Health and safety compliance
- ◆ Negotiation of technology framework agreements
- ◆ Preparation of payroll, management accounts and cash management
- ◆ Management of catering contracts
- ◆ Company secretarial duties, including Freedom of Information Act request management

- **Financial governance and oversight**

The Executive management team reviews monthly management accounts against budget and latest forecasts; the Finance Committee (a sub-committee of the main board of Trustees) also reviews these termly as well as reviewing and challenging the annual budget in detail before the Trustees approve the figures.

The central office works closely with each academy as it prepares its budget and monitors actual performance against expectations. The central team also reviews contracts that the schools wish to enter into with third parties for fairness and value. During the year the academies have reviewed their purchasing policies to ensure that they are in line with HM Treasury's Regularity, propriety and value for money handbook.

During the year an internal audit resource was recruited reporting directly to the Risk and Audit Committee. The function provides independent assurance that the Trust's internal controls are robust, and there is now an Internal Audit Charter and annual plan in place, using a risk based approach to oversee the academies.

Signed: 

Name: Jon Coles

Academy Trust Accounting Officer

Date: 10/12/14

